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Source: *The Journal of African History*, 2008, Vol. 49, No. 2 (2008), pp. 261-279

Published by: Cambridge University Press

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40206642>

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HISTORY, MEMORY AND THE LEGACY OF SAMORI IN SOUTHERN MALI, c. 1880–1898*

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ABSTRACT: This article seeks to situate local oral traditions on Samori Touré within the contexts of both internal African empire building and French colonial conquest. It takes into account the experiences of the vanquished on the periphery of Samori's empire in an effort to reassess his legacy. It argues that local traditions not only provide a corrective to the nationalist historiography on Samori, they also complicate the notion of 'resistance' by demonstrating internal dissent and even rebellion against Samorian rule at a time of Samori's vaunted 'primary resistance' to French conquest. Finally, this article concludes by providing a contemporary reading of the southern Malian historical landscape, rooting local Samorian history and politics in particular 'sites of memory'.

KEY WORDS: Mali, resistance, memory, local history, imperialism.

'THERE is a stream in this region named Jaban. Do you know this stream? Jaban? It is located between Soloba and Guélélénkoro. Samori killed, killed and killed the people of Basidibé along the banks of this stream. Even today, the waters of this stream are red'.¹ An elder in the village of Solona was repeating a common motif in local oral traditions on Samori Touré, the founder of an ephemeral nineteenth-century West African empire. He continued:

There was such massacre and destruction that the refugees who fled came here saying: 'it is terrible along the banks of Jaban. The rest of the people who are still alive, if you do not come together to survive, the war is coming, and the war chief will massacre all of Wasulu'. It was for that reason that we later formed a coalition and rose up against Samori.

The stream of Jaban is one of numerous 'sites of memory' scattered across the historical landscape of southern Mali.² Such local historical sites and the

* Research and writing was made possible through grants from the Fulbright Program (IIE) and the Harry Frank Guggenheim Foundation. I would like to thank Melis Ece, Andy Feffer, Robert Harms, Julie Livingston, Mike Mahoney, Greg Mann, Mike McGovern and Ben Talton for their suggestions on earlier drafts of this paper. In Bamako, my gratitude goes to Sekou Camara, Mamadou Diawara and Adama Koné, and in southern Mali, many thanks to Yacouba 'Doumbia' Danyoko and Tlegné Coulibaly. I owe enormous thanks to the many elderly Malians who took the time to share their local histories and family oral traditions with an interested outsider. I wish to express my gratitude to Emmanuel Akyeampong and the journal's reviewers for their incisive comments and editorial guidance.

¹ Interview, Souleyman Sidibé, Solona, 10 Apr. 2002. The Jaban is a small (30-kilometer long) tributary to the Sankarani River, along Mali's national border with Guinea.

² On the historical landscape of southern Guinea during the time of Samori, see in particular J. Fairhead and M. Leach, *Misreading the African Landscape: Society and Ecology in a Forest-Savanna Mosaic* (Cambridge, 1996), 94–8.

oral traditions tied to them stand in contrast to the nationalist images of Samori as a resistance hero and martyr, commemorated in popular histories, songs, oral epics, statues, murals and even postage stamps.³ They represent the voices that were silenced during postcolonial state-building processes and the attendant production of national identities and 'statist narratives'. They provide a counter-narrative and necessary corrective to nationalist interpretations of African resistance to colonial rule.⁴

Recent scholarship on landscape and memory in African history has explored changes in meanings and practices tied to religious sites, while also emphasizing the politics and perceptions of natural and sacred landscapes.⁵ In contrast to such studies, I want to highlight local 'sites of memory', situating the legacy and collective memories of Samori in relation to particular places where important events occurred. But rather than focusing on singular sites linked to events of national relevance, in the concluding section of this article, I draw attention to a plurality of lesser sites of local importance, the whole of which serves as a sort of regional *aide-mémoire*. Although not constitutive of 'archival memory', in Nora's conceptualization, these sites nevertheless serve as 'external props and tangible reminders' of defining moments in local history.⁶

It has been over forty years since the last article on Samori appeared in the *Journal of African History*.⁷ Since then, while considerable research has been done on Samorian state formation and military campaigns, the histories of the vanquished populations have remained largely in obscurity.⁸ This article

³ On oral epics of Samori, see L. Kesteloot and B. Dieng, *Les épopées d'Afrique noire* (Paris, 1997); J. W. Johnson, T. A. Hale and S. Belcher, *Oral Epics from Africa: Vibrant Voices from the Vast Continent* (Bloomington, 1997); S. Belcher, *Epic Traditions of Africa* (Bloomington, 1999); and J. Jansen, 'A critical note on the epic of Samori Touré', *History in Africa*, 29 (2002), 219–29. On postage stamps, see A. Adedze, 'Commemorating the chief: the politics of postage stamps in West Africa', *African Arts* (Summer 2004). See *L'Empereur Almamy Samori Touré: grand administrateur et grand stratège*, *Révolution démocratique africaine* 48 (Conakry, 1971), among other popular volumes. See also K. Fofana, *L'Almami Samori Touré Empereur: récit historique* (Paris, 1998).

⁴ M. R. Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston, 1995), 14–30, 53–60; F. Cooper, 'Conflict and connection: rethinking colonial African history', *American Historical Review*, 99 (1994), 1516–45; the articles in *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 33 (2000), especially R. Roberts, 'History and memory: the power of statist narratives', 513–22, and T. Sunseri, 'Statist narratives and Maji Maji ellipses', 567–84.

⁵ See, especially, S. Greene, *Sacred Sites and the Colonial Encounter: A History of Meaning and Memory in Ghana* (Bloomington, 2002); Terence Ranger, *Voices from the Rocks: Nature, Culture & History in the Matopos Hills of Zimbabwe* (Oxford, 1999); see J. Monson, 'Memory, migration and the authority of history in southern Tanzania, 1860–1960', *Journal of African History*, 41 (2000), 347–72.

⁶ P. Nora (ed.), *Realms of Memory: Rethinking the French Past*, trans. A. Goldhammer, vol. 1 (New York, 1996), 8–12.

⁷ M. Legassick, 'Firearms, horses and Samorian army administration, 1870–1898', *Journal of African History*, 7 (1966), 95–115.

⁸ Y. Person, *Samori: une révolution Dyula*, vols. 1–III (Paris, 1968–75), and Person's briefer publications: 'Les ancêtres de Samori', *Cahiers d'Etudes Africaines*, 13 (1963), 125–56; 'Samori et la Sierra Leone', *Cahiers d'Etudes Africaines*, 25 (1967), 5–26; 'Guinea-Samori', in M. Crowder (ed.), *West African Resistance: The Military Response*

seeks to address this lacuna, by elucidating the historical legacy of Samori in Wasulu, and in the broader region of 'southern Mali'.⁹ It assesses Samori's legacy from a grassroots point of view.

In nineteenth-century African history, the Samorian wars were not unique. They occurred within the context of the internal slave trade, which had disastrous consequences in many rural localities.¹⁰ Samori's wars were also part of a chain of Islamic *jihāds* across the West African savanna that opened up new slaving frontiers. Furthermore, the case of Samori draws attention to the existence of African empires which were absorbing new peoples and territories into their expansive states on the eve of European conquest, a sort of internal 'Scramble', as it were. One might cite Rabîh ibn Fadl Allah, the ivory and slave trader from the eastern Sudan who set up an expansive Islamic state around Lake Chad.¹¹ Then there was the Swahili trading empire of Tippu Tip in the eastern Congo and the conquest states of the Ndebele and Zulu in southern Africa, among many others. From the standpoint of particular rural localities, the nineteenth century was a period of successive waves of conquest, both European and African.

Even in southern Mali, Samori was not alone; there were other state-builders and local slave-raiders during the nineteenth century.¹² Among the most important were Tiéba Traore, the king (*Fàama*) of Kénéduogu, and his successor Babemba, based in Sikasso.¹³ In the buffer zones in between these larger states, rural localities formed village confederations, or small quasi-states (*kafos*), for purposes of self-defense against more powerful

to *Colonial Occupation* (New York, 1971), 111–43; J. Holden, 'The Samorian impact on Buna: an essay in methodology', in C. Allen and R. Johnson (eds.), *African Perspectives* (Cambridge, 1970), 83–108; A. S. Kanya-Forstner, *The Conquest of the Western Sudan: A Study in French Military Imperialism* (Cambridge, 1969). More recently, however, there was a conference organized in Conakry in 1998 to mark the 100th anniversary of Samori's capture and 'martyrdom'. The papers represent the Bissandugu-centric perspective (Bissandugu, Guinea, being the capital of Samori's empire), and thus do not alter the nationalist image of Samori; in fact, they take new steps in manufacturing it. See *Mande Studies*, 3 (2001), and *Centenaire du souvenir: Almami Samori Touré, 1898–1998: Symposium international de Conakry du 29 Sept. au 1 Oct. 1998* (Conakry, 2000).

⁹ I am using the appellation 'southern Mali' for this region, part of which has been known as 'Wasulu' – which straddles the modern political boundaries of Mali, Guinea and Ivory Coast – since at least the eighteenth century.

¹⁰ M. Klein, *Slavery and Colonial Rule in French West Africa* (Cambridge, 1998); P. Lovejoy, *Transformations in Slavery: A History of Slavery in Africa* (Cambridge, 1983).

¹¹ See D. Cordell, *Dar al-Kuti and the Last Years of the Trans-Saharan Slave Trade* (Madison, 1985); and W. K. R. Hallam, *The Life and Times of Rabih Fadl Allah* (Ilfracombe, UK, 1977).

¹² See J. Gallieni, *Voyage au Soudan Français, Haut-Niger et Pays de Ségou, 1879–1881* (Paris, 1885), 598.

¹³ Tiéba Traore was the king of Sikasso from 1877 to 1893, followed by Babemba from 1893 to 1898. See L. Holmes, 'Tiéba Traore, fama of Kenedougou: two decades of political development' (Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 1977); M. Collieaux, 'Contribution à l'étude de l'histoire de l'ancien royaume de Kénéduogu (1825–1898)', *Comité d'Etudes Historiques et Scientifiques de l'Afrique Occidentale Française*, 9 (1924), 128–81; and A. O. Konaré, *Sikasso Tata* (Bamako, 1983).

neighbors. These decentralized societies, wedged in the no-man's-land, in the politically fragmented margins between competing states, were constantly pillaged by the troops of Samori, Kénédugu, neighboring *kafos* or small-scale slave raiders. In 1887, for example, the French military explorer Louis Binger observed this zone:

On all the frontiers of Samori, villages are annexed or treated as enemy territory ... Neutrality does not exist ... If they've been conquered by Samori the inhabitants are sold or pillaged ... This deplorable state of things creates [a situation in which] leaving from one country, one always crosses a zone, varying between forty and fifty kilometers, in which the inhabitants do not know of whom they are the subjects. This zone is always subject to pillage, either by the bandits in the area, or by the inhabitants of neighboring villages. One could compare this frontier zone to the *marches* of ancient Europe.¹⁴

The 'time of Samori' represented a major watershed in local histories. Despite Samori's success in state-building, and bringing disparate decentralized societies under a single state, his wars and occupation were imperial in nature, characterized by violent conquest, the seizure of territorial control, enslavement and military conscription, and the imposition of an alien religion, forms of government and political authority. As a result, Samori's vaunted 'primary resistance' produced its own internal resistance, which played an important role in wearing down his war machine on the eve of French conquest. He may have held out even longer against the French had he won the support of his imperial subjects, who eventually took up arms to end his rule. Recently, Stephen Ellis has explored the issue of 'resisting Resistance', illustrating linkages between the periods of conquest and nationalism in French colonial Madagascar. He calls on scholars to examine more critically the highly ambiguous contemporary legacies of such resistance figures as Samori Touré.¹⁵

This article responds to this call. It offers a long overdue revision of Samori's legacy, based on oral traditions, but also on travelers' accounts and colonial documents. The oral traditions are mainly 'personal' or family traditions, and in some cases village accounts in wider circulation. The more formal accounts of bards (*jeliw*), important as they are, have not been included. The testimonies collected are from the past 'beyond the present generation', rather than life histories.¹⁶ These oral traditions on Samori have evolved over time, under the influence of new forms of national and transnational media as well as processes of migration and urbanization.¹⁷ Testimonies have also responded to shifts in village-level

¹⁴ L.G. Binger, *Du Niger au Golfe de Guinée par le pays du Kong et de Mossi, 1887-1889* (Paris, 1892), Part 1, 220.

¹⁵ S. Ellis, 'Colonial conquest in central Madagascar: who resisted what?' in J. Abbink, M. De Bruijn and K. Van Walraven (eds.), *Rethinking Resistance: Revolt and Violence in African History* (Leiden, 2003), 85-6; see also M. Diouf, *Le Kaajor au XIX^e siècle: pouvoir cedito et conquête coloniale* (Paris, 1990).

¹⁶ See J. Vansina, *Oral Tradition as History* (Madison, 1985), 17-32.

¹⁷ See M. Diawara, *La graine de la parole: dimension sociale et politique des traditions orales du royaume de Jaara (Mali) du XV^e au milieu du XIX^e siècle* (Stuttgart, 1990); M. Diawara, 'Mande oral popular culture revisited by the electronic media', in K. Barber (ed.), *Readings in African Popular Culture* (London, 1997), 40-8.

power relations and national politics; the contemporary 'politics of Samori' operate locally, but also within and between the frameworks of nation-states. Indeed, my informants sometimes drew attention to Samori's 'Guinean' origins, viewing Samori's wars as an invasion by 'Guineans'. But, clearly, such overly rigid distinctions based on modern nation-states, between Samori's 'Guinean' heartland and his field of conquest in Mali, and elsewhere, cannot be maintained. There was conquest and resistance on the imperial 'frontier' as well as near the empire's heartland.¹⁸ This article does not endeavor to peel back the layers of colonial and postcolonial accretions to arrive at a 'core' tradition on Samori. However, at the same time, it contends that, as the sole narrative remains, representing the collective memories of an important era in the region's history, such oral traditions must be taken seriously as local representations of history.¹⁹ Not only can oral traditions on Samori infuse the known historical narrative with new meaning and elements of human agency and subjectivity, they also have the potential to alter, or at least considerably augment, the extant literature.²⁰

RECASTING SAMORI: COLONIAL HISTORY AND NATIONALIST HISTORIOGRAPHY

In *L'étrange destin de Wangrin*, Amadou Hampaté Bâ recounts the story of a wily colonial interpreter, named Wangrin, hailing from the district of Buguni.²¹ In telling how Wangrin became part of the colonial administration, Bâ notes the incursions of Samori that led many people to accept the *Pax Gallica*:

His country was the sad arena where conquering Yorsam [Samory], who sought to carve an empire for himself by fighting against Nubigu [Buguni], engaged in lengthy conflicts, waging war at the same time against the French so as to protect the domains he had already conquered. The senseless atrocities inflicted by Yorsam encouraged the people of Nubigu to welcome the French conquerors with open arms.²²

As Buguni was one of the regions that suffered most heavily during the Samorian wars, inhabitants initially embraced the French for defeating their oppressor. After conquest, ritual idioms expressing notions of protection and dependency were employed in colonial encounters. Colonial officials confidently stated that inhabitants were grateful for their 'liberation' from

¹⁸ On Guinea, see E. Osborn, 'Power, authority, and gender in Kankan-Baté' (Ph.D. dissertation, Stanford University, 2000); M. McGovern, 'Unmasking the state: developing political subjectivities in 20th century Guinea' (Ph.D. dissertation, Emory University, 2004), 71–2; and Fairhead and Leach, *Misreading the African Landscape*, 96–9.

¹⁹ See L. White, S. F. Miescher and D. W. Cohen (eds.), *African Words, African Voices: Critical Practices in Oral History* (Indiana, 2001); and J. C. Miller (ed.), *The African Past Speaks: Essays on Oral Tradition and History* (Hamden, 1980).

²⁰ S. Ellis, 'Colonial conquest', 86.

²¹ See A. H. Bâ, *L'étrange destin de Wangrin* (Paris, 1973).

²² Translation from A. H. Bâ, *The Fortunes of Wangrin*, trans. Aina Pavolini Taylor (Bloomington, 1999), 6.

the clutches of Samori.²³ Reflecting on this history, and trying to explain the initial acceptance of French rule, one elder explained:

It was the French (*tubab*) that came and stopped Samori, this bloodthirsty king. You see why we had a lot of respect for the French at this time? We no longer heard the firing of guns. The work of Samori had been killing, but the French stopped him ... That is why we paid homage to the French and stayed behind the French.²⁴

Indeed, a term often used for colonialism, *jònyàjùru*, literally means the 'rope' or 'debt' of slavery, suggesting that people became in effect the 'slaves' of the French, to whom they owed their lives. This debt would be repaid through taxes, or *nisòngò* (soul price). Solo Sanogo noted: 'They imposed *nisòngò* on our people. They called it the price of one's soul because when the French had come and saved us from the other invaders, we owed them our lives'.²⁵ To ensure that the debt was continually repaid, colonial officials held palavers, reminding people of how they had been saved from 'Samori le sanglant'.²⁶ This coerced gratitude served the immediate needs of colonialism as administrators demonized Samori's name in justifying the colonial project. On a more practical level, the French adopted a policy of appointing *canton* and village chiefs who had fought against Samori, though on-the-ground pragmatism often prevailed.

During the interwar period, young African intellectuals sought to rehabilitate Samori's image. They wrote and produced plays with historical themes, often celebrating Sundiata Keita, the founder of the Malian empire, and Samori.²⁷ Then, during the 1950s, as colonial reforms allowed Africans to participate in electoral politics, the anti-colonial party, the Union Soudanaise – Rassemblement Démocratique Africain (US–RDA) embraced Samori; his appeal represented a broader desire for inter-territorial African unity, based on previous great empires. Party leaders of the US–RDA defined their task as 'taking up directly where the precolonial heroes like Samori left off'.²⁸ However, in the colonial district of Buguni, and especially Wasulu, Samori emerged as a contentious figure in the bitter rivalry between the US–RDA and the pro-administration Parti Progressiste Soudanais (PSP).²⁹ In time, however, due to the partisanship generated by Samori, the

²³ Lt. Adjoint, Margaine, Commandant du cercle, Bougouni, à M. Gouv.-Gén., 1894, Rap. Pol. du cercle de Bougouni, Archives Nationales du Mali (ANM), Fonds anciens (FA), I E 27.

²⁴ Interview, Namakoro Bamba, Kolondieba, 7 July 2002.

²⁵ Interview, Solo Sanogo, Woblé, 5 May 2002.

²⁶ Rap. Pol., Aug. 1900, Mar. 1902, ANM (FA), I E 27. See General Duboc, *Samory le sanglant* (Paris, 1947); for a nuanced colonial view, see J. Meniaud, *Les pionniers du Soudan: avant et après Archinard* (Paris, 1931).

²⁷ See, for example, C. H. Cutter, 'Genesis of a nationalist elite: the role of the Popular Front in the French Soudan, 1936–1939', in G. W. Johnson, *Double Impact: France and Africa in the Age of Imperialism* (Westport, 1985), 107–39; F. G. Snyder, *One-Party Government in Mali* (New Haven, 1965), 24–5.

²⁸ W. J. Foltz, *From French West Africa to the Mali Federation* (New Haven, 1965), 144.

²⁹ Interviews, Kani Sidibé, Yanfolila, 11 Mar. 2002; Musa Diallo, Kolondieba, 17 June 2002.

RDA increasingly sought to build itself on the legacy of Sundiata Keita, a more direct and illustrious political ancestor.³⁰

Across the border in Guinea, Samorian politics were equally divisive. Sekou Touré, ostensibly a descendant of Samori, emphasized historical parallels between Samori's resistance to the French and Guinea's own anti-colonial struggles. The Guinean nationalists' use of 'Samorism' broadened support for the party; an effort was made to recreate a mythical past, conferring 'traditional' legitimacy on Touré and his evolving cult of political leadership. But the intimation of Samori was also a liability, a rallying cry for the opposition. Thus, even in the heartland of Samori's empire, his legacy was far from uncontested; the descendants of those captured and enslaved by his armies were wary of the contemporary evocations.³¹

It was against this backdrop of emergent nationalism that Yves Person produced one of the true monuments of Africanist historical scholarship.³² It would be difficult in brief compass to encapsulate Person's findings. However, despite the remarkable coverage of his fieldwork – including 861 interviews across five West African countries – rarely did Person 'give voice' to the vanquished peoples. As a committed African nationalist, Person was primarily interested in explaining state formation with an eye to African traditions of state-building. Indeed, he was part of the first generation of African historians who sought to deliver 'usable pasts', by writing authentic African histories while distancing themselves from imperial historians.³³ Newly emerging African states needed symbols and histories upon which to build a sense of commonality, at a time when 'historiography became enmeshed in the nationalist drive toward independence'.³⁴ Indeed, usable pasts could become 'abusable' ones in the hands of political elites. But while the new nations embraced such histories aimed at creating solidarity, there was plenty of dissent and internal conflict beneath the veneer of unity.³⁵ One did not have to look far to find local histories that contradicted or challenged the grand nationalist narratives.

HISTORIES OF THE VANQUISHED: THE SAMORIAN INVASION, 1882–1884

Reflecting the breadth of Samori's conquests, there are many 'generic' Samori accounts in wide circulation.³⁶ There is also a tendency to conflate historical processes, using 'Samori' as shorthand. Alongside these more

³⁰ See R. S. Morgenthau, *Political Parties in French-Speaking West Africa* (Oxford, 1964), 276–84.

³¹ See, especially, E. Schmidt, *Mobilizing the Masses: Gender, Ethnicity, and Class in the Nationalist Movement in Guinea, 1939–1958* (Portsmouth NH, 2005), 107–8; and Morgenthau, *Political Parties*, 234–5.

³² Person, *Samori*, I–III.

³³ M. Klein, 'The decolonization of West African history', *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 6 (1975), 111–25.

³⁴ J. Vansina, *Living with Africa* (Madison, 1994), 56–7.

³⁵ B. Jewsiewicki and D. Newbury (eds.), *African Historiographies: What History for Which Africa?* (Beverly Hills, 1986); A. J. Temu and B. Swai, *Historians and Africanist History: A Critique* (London, 1981).

³⁶ On 'generic memories', see J. Kotre, *White Gloves: How We Create Ourselves Through Memory* (New York, 1995).

generic accounts, there are particular village and family oral traditions that often contain rich local detail. However, they, too, often occupy the gray area between oral histories and 'traditions'; even the most local stories are inflected with bits and pieces of legendary references and motifs that animate and color accounts. The goal of this section is to recast the standard narrative by inserting elements of human agency and meaning based on the perspectives of vanquished peoples. But before proceeding, an initial thumbnail sketch of Samorian history is in order.

Samori Touré started out as a Jula trader in the Malinké heartland of Guinea during the 1850s and 1860s. Eventually, he was able to draw on support from the far-flung Jula trade networks in founding his state, with its capital at Bissandugu, Guinea, in the early 1870s. In time, Samori created an empire with the aim of establishing greater control over trade; he conquered new territories across the savanna and forest fringes of West Africa. This process of state expansion brought with it widespread enslavement and also a component of *jihād*. By the 1880s, the Samorian state was depending heavily on the internal slave trade for its procurement of horses; cavalry forces were a crucial part of the enslavement mechanism. Furthermore, as skirmishes with the French conquest armies began in 1883, Samori threw himself further into the gun trade. From then onward, Samori would simultaneously be fighting wars of conquest against fellow Africans while waging a sixteen-year defensive guerrilla war against the French.³⁷

In southern Mali, Samori's direct occupation lasted from 1882 to 1893, with a brief reinvasion by Samorian forces in 1894 after his flight from advancing French troops. It began in Wasulu, among the *kafos* of Basidibé, Jallon-Fula and Gwanan, just as the French were expanding into the Western Sudan. At first, Samori was able to exploit internal divisions, playing one group off against another; those who collaborated were rewarded, and those who resisted were punished.³⁸ The *kafo* of Basidibé resisted the Samorian incursions and was one of the most devastated. According to colonial documents, many people fled Basidibé after their failed resistance, taking refuge near the French post in Kati along the Niger River.³⁹ Hari Sidibé recounted the Samorian invasion of Basidibé:

My own mother and my husband's mother lived through the wars of Samori. According to them, the wars of Samori came to lay siege to the village. At this time a large mud wall surrounded the village. But, it was the rainy season, so when Samori's troops arrived, half of the people were out in the fields, while the other half were in the village. So the people fled into the hills above the village ... But, when the population had run out of weapons and they had nothing to eat, they decided it was time to flee the village.⁴⁰

Inserting human agency into local Samorian history, Hari Sidibé recalled the fate of her ancestors, who were captured in flight and forced to farm in Samori's 'collective fields' before managing to escape. Her account conveys a

³⁷ Person, *Samori*, I–III.

³⁸ See *ibid.* 391–6; E. Péroz, *L'empire de l'Almamy-Emir Samory ou empire du Ouassoulou* (Besançon, 1888); J. L. Amselle, *Mestizo Logics: Anthropology of Identity in Africa and Elsewhere* (Stanford, 1998), 89–90.

³⁹ Bulletin Politique, May 1896, Rap. Pol., ANM (FA), I E 27; interview, Lamine Diakite, Yanfolila, 14 Apr. 2002. ⁴⁰ Interview, Hari Sidibé, Yanfolila, 9 Apr. 2002.

sense of the collective mental map of the locality, emphasizing particular markers in the landscape: the symbolic importance of ‘cross[ing] the Balé’ into Gualala – hence ending ‘their slavery’ – and arriving at the Niger River, where her ancestors were reunited with their family and other refugees.⁴¹ She continued:

All of those who were captured were marched side by side until they arrived at the destination of the war camp. The men were then sent out to the collective fields to cultivate and the women were kept in the village to do domestic work, looking for wood. N’ténén and Samba passed the rainy season farming. And then they decided to flee when the maize was mature and the fonio was ready. They escaped under a full moon and they passed by Yanfolila here ... Then they crossed the Balé and arrived at Gualala, and that is when their slavery was ended. They found their family on the banks of the Joliba [Niger River] and they settled behind the Joliba.⁴²

After Samori successfully subjugated Wasulu in the west, he continued eastward on his path, crossing the Baoulé River in 1883. Then, during the dry season of 1884, his forces pushed across the Banifing River and began their invasion of the *kafos* of Fulala and Céndugu.⁴³ Despite the resistance of an inter-village coalition of fighters, the people of Céndugu were forced to capitulate. But many had heard news that Samori was coming before he actually arrived, enabling people to flee without facing combat. As Doulaye Koné recounted: ‘The people of Kebila and Kolondieba deserted the territory. We fled for Maàlé. And we spent nine years taking refuge in Maàlé’.⁴⁴ With Céndugu occupied by *sofas* (Samori’s soldiers), Samori’s forces now turned their attention to the *kafo* of Fulala, starting with Sekana, whose inhabitants were part of the stream that alerted the villages of southern Fulala of the impending war, thus saving many lives.⁴⁵ Many of the refugees, however, were enslaved by Samori’s cavalry forces sweeping through the forests and waiting at key river crossings for potential booty. And even those refugees who made it safely into exile in Maàlé were often forced to ‘sell themselves’ into slavery to survive.⁴⁶

Most of the villages, abandoned or not, were plundered by Samori’s troops and left in ruins. But a few emerged unscathed, such as key Senufo villages located across the Kankéléba River, a sort of eco-cultural frontier.⁴⁷ Moro, whose inhabitants were regarded as the *dugukolotigiw*, or ‘masters of the land’, in the region, was not even attacked. One informant explained, ‘Samori came through the region, but he never came to our village, he never made war here ... It was protected by our spirits (*jinéw*)’.⁴⁸ Similarly, in the village of Woblé, villagers today tell of having been shielded by their village protective spirits: ‘When Samori came to Woblé, his troops surrounded the

⁴¹ Refugees placed themselves under the protection of the ‘war chief’ (*kéléti*) San Musa Sidibé in Kati, Moriba Balan in Gualala, Wòyò in Jadafara or Debiningué in Solona. Interview, Amadou Sidibé, Solona, 10 Apr. 2002.

⁴² Interview, Hari Sidibé, Yanfolila, 9 Apr. 2002.

⁴³ See Person, *Samori*, 494–5; interview, Drissa Diallo, N’Golobala, 18–20 May 2002.

⁴⁴ Interviews, Doulaye Koné, Kolondieba, 19 Nov. 2002.

⁴⁵ Binger, *Du Niger*, 70–2; Youssouf Coulibaly, Tenemakana, 15 May 2002.

⁴⁶ Interview, Broulaye Doumbia, Tenemakana, 13 May 2002.

⁴⁷ Interview, Broulaye Koné, Kolondieba, 21 Nov. 2002.

⁴⁸ Interview, Sirakoro Traore, Moro, 6 May 2002.

village. But he was not able to penetrate the village because there was a powerful spirit (*jiné*), that we named Jisòda'.⁴⁹ Then, as Samori pushed further south and east, he came into conflict with the armies of the Kénédugu state in 1884. According to Person, the main factor was that the Bagoé River frontier seemed to be suddenly closing, as the Kénédugu and Samorian states expanded into the zone, and neither party wanted to see the other assume hegemony over the fertile and populous zone. Therefore, Tieba sent his brother, Siaka, at the end of the rainy season of 1884 to the Bagoé River region to patrol the trade route, preventing Jula traders from selling horses to Samori's troops. He also began drumming up support among the villages and inciting rebellion against Samori.⁵⁰ The eventual conflict between the two states would begin with small skirmishes along the Bagoé River frontier, provoked by Samori's raids across the river into Ganadugu. In short order, the area became a battleground and no-man's-land pillaged for people and food, caught between the two warring states. Following Samori's initial invasion of Niéné, Siaka conquered the region. Faced with famine, many people surrendered. One informant emphasized the fact that they 'voluntarily' submitted to slavery:

After Samori, it was then Siaka who was the war chief. He laid siege to Nangalasso here and they did all that without being able to conquer the village. But according to our elders, the troops were unable to take Woblé, it was not destroyed by war. It was at the end of the rainy season, the soldiers from Sikasso came into our fields and took our crops and returned to Sikasso with our harvest. How could we fight this famine? Our elders were concerned, so they took the measures necessary to survive following the famine. The solution was to sell our people voluntarily to the kings of Sikasso to avoid the future wars and permit our villagers to survive. So our villagers voluntarily surrendered and handed themselves over as slaves to Siaka ... That way they would survive and save the future of our bloodline.⁵¹

Not everyone fled or submitted to slavery. In the villages that accepted Samorian rule some people remained working in the fields.⁵² But, even under occupation, villagers were still threatened by the occasional slave raids of the *sofa* chiefs.⁵³ In villages that were destroyed, some women, elders and children, who were too weak for the long journey into exile, hid out in the forests and underground man-made caves, such as those located between Tenemakana and Wakoro. While most of these people died of starvation in the ruins, a small number were able to eke out an existence, gathering wild plants, fruits and roots.⁵⁴ Despite the hardship, by the dry season of 1885 people were planning to revolt.

RESISTING RESISTANCE: HOLY WAR AND ITS DISCONTENTS, 1884-1893

Samori used Islam as a tool in state formation in order to create cohesion across a vast and culturally variegated empire. In many of the territories

⁴⁹ Interview, Solo Sanogo, Woblé, 4 May 2002; see Binger, *Du Niger*, 168-73.

⁵⁰ Person, *Samori*, 503. ⁵¹ Interview, Ngolo Sanogo, Woblé, 5 May 2002.

⁵² Larger villages were under the authority of one of Samori's delegates (*dugukunsigiw*). See the case of the village of Ouré. Binger, *Du Niger*, 66.

⁵³ *Ibid.* 218-19; interview, Musa Sumoaro, Kolondieba, 20 Nov. 2002.

⁵⁴ Interview, Youssouf Coulibaly, Tenemakana, 15 May 2002.

conquered, Samori built mosques, set up Quranic schools, and even established a judicial system. Then, in 1884, the Samorian state took a distinctly theocratic turn: Samori took the title of Almami; forced conversion to Islam became state policy. The institutions, and impact, of Samori's 'new religious policy', as Person termed it, varied from place to place. In Wasulu, Islamization was pursued mainly through the establishment of Quranic schools and the compulsory attendance of the sons of chiefs.⁵⁵ But, in other regions, Islam was imposed through 'particularly brutal and inquisitorial methods'.⁵⁶ Conversion 'at the point of the sword' accompanied conquest.⁵⁷ In Kolondieba, one informant said: 'Samori waged his wars as *jihād*. If you did not pray, he killed you. If you already prayed, he left your village alone'.⁵⁸

Samori's forced conversion policies were the main reason that he failed to gain support from among the people in his wars against the French. As he began imposing Islamic protocols, outlawing the *kòmò* secret power association and consumption of *dòlò* (millet beer), and sending soldiers to destroy village sacred sites, power objects and masks, villagers became more determined to revolt.⁵⁹ Thus, even as warfare escalated in 1885 between Samori and the French, people in the region fought their own wars of resistance against the Almami.⁶⁰ Within days of the revolt, the *sofas* of Siondugu and Fulala had been massacred and most of the occupying forces in Céndugu had been defeated. Namakoro Bamba told of the bravery and resistance during the revolt:

My grandfather revolted during the wars of Samori. You know, there were some brave men here, eh! There was one man named Nopéné. He was the village chief. When the wars of Samori returned to Kolondieba, people loaded a rifle and handed it to him and he would fire, to the left and to the right, without stopping. He decimated a regiment like this ... Nopéné lived right here. Then there was another man named Ba Sonya. He was from the Sonyalaka clan. He ran behind the enemy at such great speed that they couldn't stop him. He was one of our grandfathers. I saw him alive. He wasn't a chief, but he was a brave man here in Kolondieba.⁶¹

In Céndugu, and elsewhere, women contributed to the rebellion. Aside from helping to procure food by gathering wild fruits and plants and farming, women also served as warriors.⁶² Broulaye Koné explained: 'At this time, on the field of battle, some women fought more than their husbands, because they did not want to have themselves and their children taken away as slaves'.⁶³ Even those women who stayed at home helped their husbands by performing special rituals and wearing power objects, and vowing to remain

⁵⁵ Interviews, Sekou Sidibé, Jelifin, 31 Mar. 2002; Imam Sidibé, Balafina, 2 Apr. 2002. See Rapport du Capt. Vuillemot, 1899, Politique musulmane, ANM FA, 4 E 42; Binger, *Du Niger*.

⁵⁶ Person, *Samori*, 503.

⁵⁷ On the broader context of this issue, see John Ralph Willis (ed.), *Slaves and Slavery in Muslim Africa: Islam and the Ideology of Enslavement*, vol. 1 (London, 1985).

⁵⁸ Interview, Musa Sumoaro, Kolondieba, 20 Nov. 2002.

⁵⁹ Interview, Drissa Diallo, N'Golobala, 18 May 2002.

⁶⁰ For the background on French conquest, see Kanya-Forstner, *The Conquest of the Western Sudan*, 84–270.

⁶¹ Interviews, Namakoro Bamba, Kolondieba, 1 June 2002.

⁶² Interview, Youssouf Coulibaly, Tenemakana, 21 May and 6 Oct. 2002.

⁶³ Interview, Broulaye Koné, Kolondieba, 19 Nov. 2002.

faithful. Men wore power objects fabricated by their wives, which protected them against the enemy.⁶⁴ Furthermore, the construction of walls and mud fortifications (*tata*) was widespread across the West African hinterland.⁶⁵ Historically, dispersed settlements and small villages in the savanna region were often amalgamated into larger and better-protected villages equipped with fortifications.⁶⁶ Since most men were practiced hunters, with either bow and arrow or even firearms, they would perch atop the mud walls and shoot at the enemy intruders as they approached. Fields were cultivated closer to the villages, and men brought their weapons out to the fields, working in large collective groups. Lookouts were posted in the treetops to warn of Samorian troops by blowing a horn or beating on a drum.⁶⁷ Namakoro Bamba explained:

The men who cultivated at the time took their weapons into the fields with them when they farmed together. If you were not armed, *sofas* could come and attack and lead you away in slavery. All of the farmers went into the fields armed together. Therefore, some people would have to stand guard, sitting high up in the treetops in order to watch out over the fields for any bandits or warriors. If there were many attackers coming, the farmers would be forced to flee, but if there were only two or three, they would confront them.⁶⁸

There was 'honor' (*dànbê*) in fighting in defense of one's village, and, in contrast, it brought 'shame' (*màlòya*) to be defeated militarily and sold into slavery.⁶⁹ As such, many informants emphasized that submission was rarely the direct result of battle; it was because of starvation. Musa Sumoaro explained:

If you say that Samori captured many slaves here, it was because of famine. It was out of hunger, not because of Samori's bravery, because Samori attacked many villages without success ... At this time, everyone cultivated together and kept their harvest in the field. When you were under siege you couldn't leave the *tata*, the walls couldn't be crossed once the guns were firing, hitting the walls of the *tata*. That is why Samori laid siege on the villages, nobody could leave and when you were starving from hunger without food, you finally surrendered.⁷⁰

Eventually, towards the end of the dry season in 1887, the rebellion was crushed. Samori now turned his attention to Sikasso. However, the region between the Bagoé and Baoulé Rivers was completely devastated, a fact that would come back to haunt Samori during his long retreat across Wasulu. As the 18-month siege of Sikasso dragged on, Samori would rely upon heavy

⁶⁴ *Ibid.* See D. Conrad, 'Mooning armies and mothering heroes: female power in the Mande epic tradition', in R. Austin (ed.), *In Search of Sunjata: The Mande Oral Epic as History, Literature, and Performance* (Bloomington, 2000), 189–224. Sekou Camara, personal communication, Bamako, Oct. 2002.

⁶⁵ Interview, Musa Sumoaro, Kolondieba, 20 Nov. 2002.

⁶⁶ See M. Klein, 'Defensive strategies: Wasulu, Masina, and the slave trade', in S. A. Diouf (ed.), *Fighting the Slave Trade: West African Strategies* (Athens, 2003), 64–5.

⁶⁷ Interviews, Karim Danyoko, Tenemakana, 11 Oct. 2002; Yacouba Danyoko, Tenemakana, 23 June 2002.

⁶⁸ Interview, Namakoro Bamba, Kolondieba, 7 July 2002.

⁶⁹ On honor in comparative context in Africa, see J. Iliffe, *Honour in African History* (Cambridge, 2005).

⁷⁰ Interview, Musa Sumoaro, Kolondieba, 20 Nov. 2002.

exactions from his subjects.⁷¹ In this zone, those who had not been able to flee were rounded up and used as porters by Samori, or placed in fields to farm until they collapsed.⁷² An even larger portion was sold off to obtain horses and guns. Waves of refugees were flowing out of the combat zone, as Louis Binger observed:

On the right bank, where I camp, I discover people coming from the battle lines. All are in a deplorable state of health, and among them are the dying ... Most of them are extremely weak; they have been feeding themselves for a whole month on corn stalks, leaves and raw vegetation ... Even if they are not near their village, at least, in two or three days they will have escaped certain death, because they will have left the deserted zone separating the Baoulé from Sikasso ... Those who are living seem dead standing up, a cane in hand, emaciated from hunger, eyes expressing no consciousness, nor astonishment, no longer having awareness of what they're doing; they walk dragging themselves painfully along the paths until they fall from starvation ... They no longer have the strength to articulate a syllable. They already have the grimace of death on their lips.⁷³

This 'deserted zone' from which the refugees fled had become a landscape of ruins. As famine spread along the trail of misery connecting Sikasso to Samori's base in Bissandugu, Guinea, rumors of Samori's death began, and murmurs of rebellion once again circulated. The 'great revolt' would begin in 1887 and bring about the demise of the 'first Samorian state' based at Bissandugu, Guinea. The hardships and exactions of war, and the continuance of forced conversion policies, were at the root of people's discontent during this second rebellion. In 1887, the first defections were at the periphery of the empire in market towns such as Tengrela. Soon, large-scale revolts erupted in Wasulu.⁷⁴ Then, towards the end of the rainy season of 1888, with numerous revolts breaking out throughout the empire, Samori retreated from Sikasso. Desperate from hunger and imminent defeat, his troops pillaged and attacked villages mercilessly along the route in the hope of securing slaves or food.⁷⁵ The suppression of the Wasulu revolt was quick and severe. Samori engaged in scorched earth practices and made public displays of mass executions of rebels. One of the bloodiest scenes was the massacre at Samamurula (in Gwandiaka *kafo*), where the insurgents, numbering in the thousands, were rounded up and decapitated for hours in the plains behind the town.⁷⁶ In the meantime, the French pushed inexorably into the Samorian heartland, marching on Siguiri, and later Kankan and Bissandugu (Guinea) in 1891. By 1892, with his empire crumbling from within and without, Samori was forced to flee to the east. Passing through Wasulu, he ordered the mass relocation of entire villages. However, some villages, such as N'tentu, refused to move, and paid the price; men were massacred and women and children were led away in slavery. The revolt in Wasulu had ended, but under pressure from the French, Samori abandoned

⁷¹ The *Fàama* (king) of Sikasso, Tiéba Traoré, was able to repel Samori, owing to Sikasso's formidable fortress that effectively neutralized the weapons differential. Binger, *Du Niger*, 95–6; Klein, *Slavery and Colonial Rule*, 109–10.

⁷² Interview, Drissa Diallo, N'Golobala, 18 May 2002.

⁷³ Binger, *Du Niger*, 66–7.

⁷⁴ Person, *Samori*, 1050–64.

⁷⁵ Interview, Drissa Diallo, N'Golobala, 18 May 2002.

⁷⁶ Person, *Samori*, 1062.

Wasulu and continued his retreat to northern Ivory Coast, where he would find even less local support.⁷⁷

*PAX GALLICA AND THE UNSTABLE COLONIAL FRONTIER,
1893–1898*

In December of 1893, the French military established a garrisoned post in the new colonial district (*cercle*) of Buguni. Within days, Lt. Colonel Etienne Bonnier, the head of the expeditionary force sent against Samori, was dashing off to conquer Timbuktu, where he would die in a Tuareg ambush.⁷⁸ During the first years of French military rule in Buguni, there was not a clearly demarcated administrative district as such. Eventually the colonial frontier, or the 'zone of occupation' as officials called it, expanded, enabling refugees to return from exile.⁷⁹ However, despite the colonial decrees prohibiting the slave trade in 1894, enslavement and kidnapping would continue to thrive with the breakdown of inter-village alliances and in the absence of traditional authority structures. Villages were reportedly split along partisan lines, resulting in local slave-producing wars.⁸⁰ By 1898, the colonial frontier expanded eastward, culminating in the French attack on Sikasso. In the aftermath, refugees fled westward, while others were enslaved by colonial troops; even European soldiers and officers reportedly joined in the pillaging, as African colonial soldiers (*tirailleurs*) were given slaves as payment for their services.⁸¹

Given the shortage of able-bodied laborers during the early years of reconstruction, many villages resorted to kidnapping to secure farm labor. Escaped slaves or refugees searching for their homes were seized in transit, and people were kidnapped in the fields as they worked.⁸² Broulaye Koné recounted:

After the French first arrived, people were still afraid to be alone in the fields, because warfare continued. One could come and take you away and bring you far away from your field, to go and sell you. At this time, people 'fed themselves' off other people. They began enslaving each other to survive. Solomonin-Jan, who was in Kola at this time, his father apparently had just gone out to cut and harvest his millet when he was enslaved and taken away like this.⁸³

Most enslavement was opportunistic in nature. Local 'warlords' enslaved anyone who passed through their territory. Fugitive slaves and refugees were intercepted by marauders, 'sorts of pirates of the bush', and sold 'for a cheap

⁷⁷ Rap. Pol., 5 Feb. 1894, and 11 Jan. 1894, ANM (FA), I E 27. See Klein, *Slavery and Colonial Rule*, 109–111.

⁷⁸ Kanya-Forstner, *The Conquest of the Western Sudan*, 216–21.

⁷⁹ May 1894, Rap. Pol., ANM (FA), I E 27.

⁸⁰ Jan. 1895, Rap. Pol., ANM (FA), I E 27. Interview, Jan-Jan Sidibé, Balafina, 3 Apr. 2002.

⁸¹ Interview, Youssouf Sidibé, Koniba-Barila, 27 Mar. 2002; Rap. Pol., Mar. 1894, ANM (FA), I E 27; Klein, *Slavery and Colonial Rule*, 111–19; R. Roberts, 'The end of slavery in the French Soudan, 1905–1914', in S. Miers and R. Roberts (eds.), *The End of Slavery in Africa* (Madison, 1988), 282–307.

⁸² 1899 and 1895, Rap. Pol., ANM (FA), I E 27; interview, Bourama Dembele, Tenemakana, 16 June 2002.

⁸³ Interview, Broulaye Koné, Kolondieba, 21 Nov. 2002.

price' in the markets.⁸⁴ To minimize the risks of kidnapping or starvation, families sent male scouts ahead to resettle before displacing everyone.⁸⁵ During this period, there was a widespread shortage of women. Although statistics on births are non-existent from this period, demographic recovery based on biological reproduction was slow in coming.⁸⁶ Furthermore, changes occurred in kinship systems and marriage protocols as people broke taboos on inter-marriage between certain lineages.⁸⁷ As women were highly valued in reconstituting village communities, this made them the principal targets of kidnapping.⁸⁸

SAMORI'S ISLAMIC LEGACY

The history of Samori is a case study in the failure of state-directed conversion policies during a period of widespread warfare and enslavement. Indeed, few were willing to embrace a religion imposed through violence and coercion. Furthermore, as evinced in the revolts of 1885 and 1888, Samori's attempt at establishing Muslim political hegemony in the region was rejected by the inhabitants. While Muslim towns were dispersed along the main trade arteries, and Muslim enclaves existed in the *kafo* of Gwanan, the vast majority of people in rural areas remained adherent to forms of *bamanaya* (non-Muslim religious practices) in the nineteenth century.⁸⁹ Although the wars of Samori destabilized the religious landscape of southern Mali, by uprooting communities and cutting people off from religious sites and practices, most of my informants were clear that Samori did not succeed in converting people to Islam. For example, in the *kafo* of Fulala, one *imam* said:

Samori was an ambitious man who justified his conquests as part of a *jihād* that he would lead against the infidels in order to capture slaves ... He had chosen as a pretext for his conquests that he would convert all the infidels to Islam. If he really had this single ambition of converting the region to Islam, it is certain that Islam would have remained afterwards in such or such a village, where the people could even right now show you by saying 'there, you see, such or such village was converted to Islam by Samori'. But, there doesn't exist any such village, not even one village!⁹⁰

While I would not want to give too much weight to single testimonies, this account is very representative of the views of my informants, few of whom were willing to give any credit to Samori for introducing Islam into the area.⁹¹ In explaining why Samori had not succeeded in his mass conversion

⁸⁴ January 1895, May 1900, Rap. Pol., ANM (FA), I E 27.

⁸⁵ May 1896, Rap. Pol., ANM (FA), I E 27; interview, Youssouf Sidibé, Koniba-Barila, 27 Mar. 2002. ⁸⁶ Rap. de Tournée, 10 June 1899, ANM (FA), I E 27.

⁸⁷ Interview, Broulaye Doumbia, Tenemakana, 13 May 2002.

⁸⁸ Interview, Hawa Diallo, Tenemakana, 21 May 2002; Bourama Dembele, Tenemakana, 14 June 2002.

⁸⁹ See René Caillié, *Voyage à Tombouctou*, vols. I–II (Paris, 1996); Rapport du Capt. Vuillemot, 1899, Politique musulmane, ANM (FA), 4 E 42. Most of my informants noted that the 'coming of prayer' occurred during the colonial period.

⁹⁰ Interview, Drissa Diallo, N'Golobala, 18 May 2002.

⁹¹ Interviews, Broulaye Doumbia, Tenemakana, 13–21 May 2002 and 6 Oct. 2002; Doulaye Koné, Kolondieba, 19 Nov. 2002; Adama Diallo, Niamala, 7 Oct. 2002;

efforts, *imams* cited the 'No Compulsion' verse from the Qur'an, condemning Samori's actions.⁹² As one informant in the village of Niamala noted:

Samori killed in ignorance ... Samori was a powerful man, but he was not a real believer. On the path of Allah, there is no need for forcing Islam on people. After the descent of the Qur'an, Allah said that there is no more compulsion in religion. This cannot be done.⁹³

For practicing Muslims, there was no theological rationale for the Samorian wars. A few informants said that Samori had been guided by a spirit (*jiné*), or a power object (*jò*), which turned malevolent.⁹⁴ In further distancing Islam from the atrocities of Samori, many informants pointed out how Samori killed fellow Muslims.⁹⁵ Although in the distinct minority, there are a few who credit Samori with laying something of the Islamic groundwork in Wasulu. One informant said: 'I suppose you could say that Samori propagated Islam in this region. Samori had begun his wars as a holy war. And when he arrived in this country, he gathered certain numbers of children and entrusted them to Quranic schoolteachers'.⁹⁶ However, even this informant admitted that Samori's Islamization policies 'contributed to the destruction of this region with his blood-spilling wars'.⁹⁷ Finally, further evidence of Samori's failed attempt at mass conversion comes from the early colonial period when a resurgence of *bamanaya* occurred after the defeat of Samori. Clearly, there was little enduring enthusiasm for Islam after the misery and destruction caused by its most powerful proponent in the region.⁹⁸ In the end, while Samori's Islamic legacy would also be a function of the more general impact that his conquests had in redistributing people, such as slaves, throughout the region, Islamization 'from above' had won few willing or lasting converts.⁹⁹

THE BURDEN OF HISTORY: SITES OF MEMORY AND LOCAL POLITICS IN A LANDSCAPE WITHOUT MONUMENTS

The wars of Samori represented the last 'great war' on southern Malian soil, but there are no monuments as such, no statues to honor fallen soldiers, or national commemorative holidays. The maintenance of collective memories

Souleyman Sidibé, Solona, 10 Apr. 2002; Moussa Sumoaro, Kolondieba, 20 Nov. 2002; Youssouf Sidibé, Koniba-Barila, 27 Mar. 2002; Imam Sidibé, Balanfina, 3 Apr. 2002.

⁹² See A. J. Arberry (trans.), *The Koran Interpreted* (New York, 1955), 65; interviews, Sekou Sidibé, Jelifin, 31 Mar. 2002, and Youssouf Coulibaly, Tenemakana, 21 May 2002.

⁹³ Interview, Adama Diallo, Niamala, 10 Oct. 2002.

⁹⁴ Interviews, Imam Sidibé, Balanfina, 2–3 Apr. 2002; Sekou Sidibé, Jelifin, 31 Mar. 2002; Adama Diallo, Niamala, 10 Oct. 2002; Drissa Diallo, N'Golobala, 18 May 2002.

⁹⁵ Interview, Doulaye Koné, Kolondieba, 19 Nov. 2002.

⁹⁶ Interview, Imam Sidibé, Balanfina, 2 Apr. 2002.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*; interview, Amadou Sidibé, Solona, 10 Apr. 2002.

⁹⁸ Interviews, Jan-Jan Sidibé, Balanfina, 2–3 Apr. 2002; Drissa Diallo, N'Golobala, 18 May 2002; Monographie de Bougouni, 1906, ANM (FA), I D 37; Rapport du Capt. Vuillemot, 1899, Politique musulmane, Rapports sur l'Islam, ANM (FA), 4 E 42.

⁹⁹ See B. J. Peterson, 'Slave emancipation, trans-local social processes and the spread of Islam in French colonial Buguni (southern Mali), 1893–1914', *Journal of African History*, 45 (2005), 421–44.

has not been the result of state efforts, a conscious ‘remembrance of things Malian’.¹⁰⁰ Rather, local history is inscribed into the land, in places which to the casual observer appear to be unremarkable stands of trees, swamps, ordinary fields, hills or streams, such as Jaban, with which I began this essay.¹⁰¹ In Fulala, there are the swamps and riverbeds between Koloni and Zimpiala, which served as a battlefield between Samori’s soldiers and resisters.¹⁰² There are the caves in the hills between Tenemakana and Wakoro, where people hid from Samori’s troops, and which are now inhabited by a demon named Nkérenké.¹⁰³ In Yanfolila, people remember how Samori executed insurgents following the ‘great revolt’ in the open fields behind the town.¹⁰⁴ Then, there are the family burial sites, and places of mourning. M’Bemba Sidibé in the village of Balanfina (Wasulu) remembered the story of his grandfather’s death. He told of how the people resisted Samori and how the village was attacked and left in ruins (*tomow*). He recalled his grandfather’s burial following the village’s defeat:

The day that Samori left here to go to Keroane [Guinea], it was the next day that my grandfather died. Asa Medi died. He was killed. His burial ceremony was presided over by Kani Balamba, and a slave who was in our village, named Kerifa. Three people buried him. Two of them dug the grave and one of them, Kani Balamba, cut the branches for the burial, and they proceeded to perform the *kolonwili* ceremony, to give my grandfather’s soul its rest.¹⁰⁵

Though many would die in their homelands, leaving scattered burial sites and unburied skeletons throughout the region, others would carry with them into exile the memories of Samori’s wars. Even though the sheer chaos and destruction had ended, Samori’s legacy would continue to be felt in the fragmented world to which refugees returned.¹⁰⁶ Families had been torn apart, fields reverted to bush, huts collapsed, villages were overtaken by thickets and wild animals. The landscape had changed so much in ten years that families could barely find their homelands. Then, upon finally locating their homes, some people found them inhabited by other displaced

¹⁰⁰ See J. Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History* (Cambridge, 1995), 29–53, 78–116.

¹⁰¹ See studies which situate environmental and social histories within local landscapes: R. Harms, *Games Against Nature: An Eco-Cultural History of the Nunu of Equatorial Africa* (Cambridge, 1987); J. McGregor, ‘Living with the river: landscape & memory in the Zambezi Valley, Northwest Zimbabwe’, in W. Beinart and J. McGregor (eds.), *Social History & African Environments* (Oxford, 2003), 87–105; E. Akyeampong, *Between the Sea and the Lagoon: An Eco-Social History of the Anlo of Southeastern Ghana, c. 1850 to Recent Times* (Athens OH, 2002).

¹⁰² Interviews, Mori Koné, Koloni, 7 Oct. 2002; Fatumata Doumbia, Zimpiala, 11 Oct. 2002.

¹⁰³ Interviews, Yacouba Danyoko, Tenemakana, 15 Nov. 2002; Broulaye Doumbia, Tenemakana, 13–14 May 2002. In 1912, a colonial official observed eight man-made cave entrances between Tenemakana and Wakoro. Large caves were also reported in Ouélénkala, one of which could hold thirty people. See *Notes sur les habitations de troglodytes dans le cercle de Bougouni*, Rap. Pol., 1912, ANM (FA), I E 27.

¹⁰⁴ Informal conversation, Abou and Moro Sidibé, Yanfolila, 15 Mar. 2002.

¹⁰⁵ Interviews, M’Bemba Sidibé, Balanfina, 3 Apr. 2002.

¹⁰⁶ On post-conquest reconstruction, see E. Kreike, *Re-Creating Eden: Land Use, Environment, and Society in Southern Angola and Northern Namibia* (Portsmouth NH, 2004).

peoples.¹⁰⁷ For example, the Sidibé inhabitants of Barila discovered their village had not only been reinhabited but also renamed 'Koniba'.¹⁰⁸ At first, the original inhabitants decided to force the 'strangers' out. But an elder in the family, Ali Jan, counseled: 'Let them cohabitate with you. They are your brothers. You don't make war on your brother'. However, despite the emergence of such communities of shared suffering and support, and the necessity of refashioning kinship ties, systems of political authority, inter-village alliances and 'landlord-stranger' reciprocities had all been thrown into disarray. In many localities, disputes over land-use rights and the chieftaincy would soon resurface during the colonial period, with their origins in such retooled and contested village foundation narratives. Even today, village elders debate Samorian history, seeking to marshal oral historical evidence and genealogical data in establishing their status as 'first comers'.¹⁰⁹ In such circumstances, this piecing together of 'history' is not aimed at a balanced assessment of the past, but at supporting particular claims, or at maintaining and justifying, or criticizing, the current state of affairs.¹¹⁰

Local histories, or voices, have often been silenced in the production of national identities and narratives premised on an uneven distribution of 'archival power', in the words of Michel-Rolph Trouillot.¹¹¹ However, even counter-narratives can reproduce within themselves their own silences, a sort of 'silences within silences'. While many people are aware that certain villages or individuals made alliances with Samori, few are willing to discuss the issue of collaboration.¹¹² Occasionally, however, and especially in cases where Samorian history has left its imprint on contemporary local politics, internal divisions erupt into public view. Many villages still hold grudges against others based on the sides they took during the conflict. In perhaps the most salient example, Jelifin is often singled out as the village that 'betrayed' Wasulu. According to local oral traditions, a war chief from Jelifin, named Filifén Bu, had captured Samori, and then let him go when Samori paid him in gold and promised to make him the chief (*jamanatigi*) of the region.¹¹³ During the Samorian period, the *kafo* of Basidibé was split between Ya Sidibé, chief of Yanfolila, and Filifén Bu of Jelifin. When Wasulu erupted in revolt against Samorian rule during the rainy season of 1888, Ya Sidibé led the insurgents in Basidibé while Filifén Bu 'remained stubbornly loyal to

¹⁰⁷ Interview, Namakoro Bamba, Kolondieba, 7 July 2002.

¹⁰⁸ Interview, Youssouf Sidibé, Koniba-Barila, 27 Mar. 2002.

¹⁰⁹ Interviews, Yacouba Diallo, N'Golobala, 20 May 2002; Bangali Koné, Bunjoba, 24 June 2002. See E. Tonkin, *Narrating our Pasts: The Social Construction of Oral History* (Cambridge, 1992), 11; D. W. Cohen and E. S. Atieno Odhiambo, *Burying SM: The Politics of Knowledge and the Sociology of Power in Africa* (Portsmouth NH, 1992), 20; S. Kuchler, 'Landscape as memory: the mapping of process and its representations in a Melanesian society', in B. Bender (ed.), *Landscape: Politics and Perspectives* (Providence, 1993), 96. ¹¹⁰ See J. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak* (New Haven, 1985), 178.

¹¹¹ Trouillot, *Silencing the Past*, 55.

¹¹² On the other hand, bards (*jeliw*) sing praises to Samori, while being fully aware of his destructive wars. Personal communications, Sekou Camara, Bamako, Oct. 2002; and Mamadou Diabaté (*jeli*), New York, Mar. 2007.

¹¹³ Interviews, Souleyman Sidibé and Amadou Sidibé, Solona, 10 Apr. 2002, and Imam El Hajj Sekou Sidibé and Drissa Balla, Jelifin, 31 Mar. 2002.

Samori', as Person noted.¹¹⁴ Following the suppression of the revolt, Filifén Bu was kept as the region's chief, and the rebels paid the price. Souleyman Sidibé explained:

It thus became Filifén Bu who collected exactions in Wasulu and gave them to Samori ... It was the same Filifén Bu who plotted against our grandfather and killed him. Filifén Bu was convinced that if he did not kill our grandfather, Samori would end up plotting against him, killing him and giving the country to our grandfather. So that was how Samori turned us against each other and continued to massacre our people.¹¹⁵

The upshot of Filifén Bu releasing Samori in return for his support as *jamanatigi* of the region was that thousands of people were killed or enslaved by Samori. Some people in Jelifin deny that their ancestor betrayed Wasulu, but many remain silent on the subject.¹¹⁶ The burden of history weighs heavily on Jelifin, whose people, for whatever actual historical reasons, are viewed as the region's pariahs. Nevertheless, in the interest of maintaining village solidarity, it may be easier to conveniently blame one's neighbors than recall betrayals from within, which commonly occurred.¹¹⁷

In the end, over 100 years after the wars of Samori, the inhabitants of southern Mali are primarily the descendants of those refugees and slaves of the late nineteenth century. They returned to their homelands and transmitted their stories to their children. The result has been that oral traditions of Samori have not been divorced from their geographical and social contexts; they have not been completely fragmented, or lost.¹¹⁸ Though local traditions certainly underwent deep transformations through years of exile and social mixture, and have been influenced by changing political circumstances, there was continuity with the past as new villages were built next to ruins abandoned during the wars of Samori.

¹¹⁴ Person, *Samori*, IIII fn. 30.

¹¹⁵ Interview, Souleyman Sidibé, Solona, 10 Apr. 2002.

¹¹⁶ Conversation with Karim Sidibé, Jelifin, 7 Apr. 2002; and interviews, El Hajj Sekou Sidibé and Drissa Balla, Jelifin, 31 Mar. 2002.

¹¹⁷ Interview, Musa Sumoaro, Kolondieba, 20 Nov. 2002.

¹¹⁸ See Isabel Hofmeyer, *We Spend Our Years as a Tale That Is Told: Oral History Narratives in a South African Chiefdom* (Portsmouth NH, 1993); and Heidi Gengenbach, 'Naming the past in a "scattered land": memory and the power of women's naming practices in southern Mozambique', *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 33 (2000), 523–42.